

READING MATERIALS IN CHINESE COMMUNIST INDOCTRINATION ATTEMPTS AGAINST AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR¹

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INTRODUCTION

MUCH publicity has been given the efforts of the Chinese Communists to indoctrinate the Americans they captured during the Korean War. Because the scope of the indoctrination program was broad and diverse, its contents cannot easily be depicted.² To list or categorize exhaustively all the topics, themes, and appeals used would require the inclusion of almost everything which figured in Chinese Communist propaganda and philosophy at the time these men were prisoners. However, some idea of the scope

of this indoctrination effort may be had by examining a comprehensive bibliography of reading material made available to the prisoners of war by the Chinese Communists. Such a bibliography has been compiled from an analysis of interviews with Air Force personnel, formerly prisoners of the Chinese Communists in Korea. This bibliography was compiled as a part of a broad study of the experiences of Air Force prisoners of war, undertaken by the Air Force Personnel and Training Research Center of the Air Research and Development Command. While this study concentrates on Air Force prisoners whose experiences were typically somewhat different from those of prisoners from the other services,³ it is believed that probably the same or similar selections of books were made available to Army and Marine Corps war prisoners.

The objective of this paper is to present this bibliography with a minimum of interpretive comment. While it may help readers to form some conception of the thinking of those responsible for the program of indoctrinating American prisoners of war, little is known regarding the extent to which selections were made purposely or merely because of

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² For general descriptions of Chinese Communist indoctrination efforts against American prisoners and their effects see United States Senate, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations, *Communist Interrogation, Indoctrination and Exploitation of American Military and Civilian Prisoners* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1957), pp. 10-13; Edgar H. Schein, "The Chinese Indoctrination Program for Prisoners of War," *Psychiatry*, XIX (May, 1956), 149-72; Albert D. Biderman, "Effects of Communist Indoctrination Attempts: Some Comments Based on an Air Force Study" (in press); Chiu Kang, "The PLA Policy for War Prisoners," *People's China*, II (August, 1950), 8-9.

³ United States Senate, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations, "Communist Interrogation, Indoctrination and Exploitation of American Military and Civilian Prisoners," *Hearings* (84th Cong., 2d sess., June 19-27, 1956 [Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1956]), pp. 141-43.

the simple availability of the titles to the camp administrators. On the one hand, there is clear evidence of a high degree of purposiveness and deliberateness in most aspects of the administration of war prisoners by the Chinese Communists. On the other hand, the frequent use of reading materials clearly unsuited for the apparent purposes of the Communist officials suggests that selection was not always so rational. The large number of titles in the bibliography published by the Foreign Languages Publishing Houses in Moscow and Peking indicates that the availability of English-language titles from these lists was an important factor in selection. The extent to which these houses were utilized may have been due as much to a reliance upon their imprimatur by Chinese officials, who themselves knew little about English-language literature, as to the convenience of it as a supply channel, however.

The Chinese by no means limited themselves to the Moscow source. Their own English-language propaganda output found its way into the camps, and there were volumes printed in the United States, Great Britain, India, and various Communist satellite countries. The likelihood that chance played some role in the materials available to at least some of the prisoners is indicated by the fact that one group of Air Force prisoners was given a set of well-worn "V-discs" phonograph records issued by the United States Armed Forces Special Services program during World War II. In the later stages of their captivity, however, it appears that the American prisoners were exposed to a rather extensive selection of the world-wide Communist book and periodical output in the English language.⁴

For reasons which will be explained below, some of the returned prisoners of war would have been able to provide information on the place of publication and the edition of a large number of the volumes. This information was not systematically solicited from them, however.

Only a very few of the returned prisoners of war were questioned closely and systematically after their return to the United States about the reading material they had seen. It is believed, however, that the bibliography below tends more to completeness than to a mere listing of titles best remembered. For this we are indebted to a few Air Force prisoners whose treatment by the Communists enabled them to recall thoroughly the readings made available to them. These men had been held in solitary confinement for long periods—as much as two years. For some, the physical environment consisted, for long periods at a time, of little more than four concrete walls, a board supported by two sawhorses, and a shuttered window. Their social contacts had been restricted to the eye of an indifferent if not hostile guard peering at intervals through the Judas hole in the door, to occasional bouts of coercive interrogation, and to observations of the social life of their six- and eight-legged cellmates. The psychological barrenness of their environment was frequently aggravated by the requirement that they sit on their bunks all day in an undeviating posture with

⁴ Broad descriptions are available of this output for the years 1954 and 1955—years during which fifteen Air Force prisoners from whom we received much of our data remained in China (see Frank Bowen Evans [ed.], *Worldwide Communist Propaganda Activities* [New York: Macmillan Co., 1955]; cf. Evron M. Kirkpatrick [ed.], *Target—the World: Communist Propaganda Activities in 1955* [New York: Macmillan Co., 1956]).

their eyes fixed upon the opposite wall.⁵ The opportunity to read was one of the few escapes the Communists allowed them. It is not surprising, then, that many of these returnees can remember in great detail the reading material made available to them.

For prisoners of war in such extreme conditions of isolation there was never enough to read. Some Air Force prisoners who had been in solitary confinement for several months with no reading material whatsoever each finally received a copy of *Economic Progress of the Chinese People's Republic*. According to the prisoners, this volume did little more than recite the "statistics" of the "tremendous gains" being made in various sectors of the economy. Yet each prisoner read it over and over again, getting great pleasure not from the content but from the *act* of reading, that is, of "doing." One prisoner, in order to pass the time, read this volume to himself in Morse code.

Prisoners of war in the camps established by the Communists during the last two years of the war who were not isolated from their fellows for punishment or as an adjunct to intensive interrogation generally had access to many books. The libraries in some compounds probably contained all or most of the titles listed in the bibliography below. Since the bulk of this bibliographic information comes from a few informants who had been imprisoned in only a few of the various places where American prisoners were held, the distribution of titles among the various camps is not known definitely.

The prisoners' memories were not

perfect, of course, and the titles they gave were checked in the Air University Library and Library of Congress catalogs to supply missing names of authors and to correct spellings and titles. Where no information on a title mentioned by a war prisoner could be found, it has been included in the bibliography as the prisoner gave it. Since much of the information is derived from tape-recorded interviews with former prisoners, some titles or authors could not be deciphered. There are a few such instances of works which apparently are Chinese. In some cases, an item may be listed that actually was part of an anthology which is also included.

The bibliography has been arranged in simple alphabetical order with no attempt to categorize the items other than as books or periodicals. The American prisoners of war themselves generally classified their readings in two categories—"propaganda" and "classics." Some included a third category, "Soviet novels," although most included these in the propaganda category. While most could understand how Remarque, Dreiser, and others found their way into the prisoners' reading list, the inclusion of writers like Hugo, London, Dumas, *et al.*, not to mention such writers as George Eliot, Emily Brontë, and Jane Austen, was generally attributed to the Communists' respect for "culture," since all these were names remembered from school literature courses. The inclusion of a book which was not transparently propagandistic led many prisoners to assume that it must be a "classic," since all books they were given were assumed to be either one or the other. Thus, Erskine Caldwell could come to share the "classics" category with Shakespeare in some prisoner-of-war classifications.

It is believed that the Communists

⁵ Albert D. Biderman, "Communist Attempts To Elicit False Confessions from Air Force Prisoners of War," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, XXXIII (September, 1957), 616-25.

were governed by somewhat the same kind of thinking, and prisoners mention interrogators who told them, "we will give you progressive books and classics to read."

As has been indicated above, only late in the war and only in certain compounds could prisoners of war choose freely from a broad list of titles like that given here. Air Force prisoners in solitary confinement or isolated small groups received what amounted to a book ration, which had to last them a long time. Several repatriates report frequent admonishments from their captor for "reading too quickly." Sometimes, they received nothing but propaganda or Communist philosophy; at others they might receive three books every few weeks, two of which were "progressive" and one a "classic."

Many prisoners of war were required to write "book reports" on the readings they had completed in order to get new ones. Some learned how to perceive the "progressive" lesson the Communists wished them to learn from even the most innocent of volumes, for example, oppressive exploitation and revolution in *Black Beauty* or the "corruption of the workers by capitalism" in O. Henry.

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